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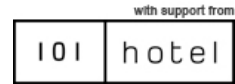
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www.gelitin.net
www.this.is/klingsogbang

Karolina Boguslawska:

“Genital Panic” in Reykjavik

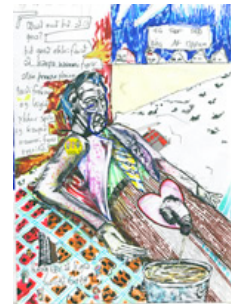
Gelitin with „Hugris“ performance at Kling and Bang Gallery

Reykjavik's artist run gallery space Kling and Bang was the stage for the latest artistic manifestation of the Austrian Gelitin group. The show with the Icelandic title “Hugris” – which means: “anything raised by mind” - was a result of a cooperation between the group members and local artists: Morri and Mundi – art amateurs as they would call themselves, Örn Bórður Örnarsson the musician, Kristján Zaklinsky, Bec Stupak the visual artists, Schuyler Maehl, an American artist from Chicago, apprentice of the Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum. The curatorial part of the show is a contribution of the well known Icelandic artist and curator: Hekla Dögg Jónssdóttir.

Gelitin is a group of friends and artists working together since 1993 with their base in the Austrian capital. They met already as kids in a summer camp in 1978, since then they have played and worked together. Tobias Urban, Wolfgang Gantner, Florian Rether and Ali Janka are all born around 1970. They work with site specific installations and use to perform in them. Their coming to Iceland was a result of the meeting with Kling and Bang artists in Paris at the Pompidou Center. They met at the Dionisiac show where Kling and Bang went with Paul McCarthy's and Jason Rhodes' (who unexpectedly died in the end of last month) Sheep plug. exhibition curated by Hekla Dögg, too.

What is the lightest object in the world?”, the Slovenian cultural critic and philosopher Slavoj Žižek asks: “The penis, because it is the only one that can be raised by mere thought. [Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The absent Center Of Political Ontology*. London; New York: Verso, p. 382-3] This intellectual joke of Žižek, illustrating the psychoanalytical concept of the phallus, become an inspiration for this performance.

Riding on Icelandic horses from Hlemmur, like Icelandic sheep boys and later posing for the photos in nineteenth century convention, artists arrived into the gallery where the public was waiting. Then the group disappeared for the moment. And after a while spectators were let in through backrooms and then down the cellar and up again. They could take a seat in a theater-like auditorium with the view on the small stage where the performance took place. The intention of the artists was to generate special kind of atmosphere in people by leading them through the dark labyrinth before they would step into another reality. On the stage seven male bodies in a sleeping like state were lying on the moss or chairs in the deep relaxation positions. The spotlights were cast on their uncovered genitals, exposed through holes cut out of their pants. They seemed to be



drowned in to dreams so far that it happened that some of them came to an erection. The stage was filled up with live images of taboo highlighted by light stream and multiplied to number of seven. The performance was continuing in very intimate, walking on the tip of the toes atmosphere of the meditation.

The audience was often making fun or commenting their penises which was making the situation even more challenging for the performers. This kind of abjection towards what people have seen, could be interpreted as sign of genital panic or awkwardness by being confronted with exposed nudity. Although nudity – or even nakedness - in art is nothing new, confusion, shock or fear are still present. Anyway spectators were invisible to the actors, they remain behind the fortress wall of the conventional theater, on the built audience. Despite general tendency of introducing the spectator directly into action, here we could experience something opposite. The suggested participation was through the dreaming reunion. Looking at the performance from feminist point of view brings even more interesting qualities. The show was far away from the macho statements, perverse or masculinity manifestation. I would say rather it was different contact with an erotic symbol, a self reflective exploration, a touch of the inexpressible. The idea that sexual excitement derives from dreams or thoughts and the mystery of sharing something more than nudity, but the intimacy of dreaming was offered to the people.

The feministic references were also clearly highlighted by the artistic quotation of Valie Export - the icon of Austrian Feminism. As theme of the poster for the show, Gelitin used the photo of Valie from 1969 where the artist dressed in black shirt and jeans with a crotch cut out of her pants, was playing with the gun. Gelitin changed the photo with cutting out the gun and adding a penis. That refers to the penis as a sufficient substitute for the gun or like a generous gesture of fulfillment of the female jealousy about penis - according to Freud. The Photography was part of Valie's Export Action Pants: Genital Panic from 1969 when the artist entered a porn cinema in Munich, declaring to astonished public that the real female genitals are available in real and anybody can do what he/she wants with it. This action -a rebel against objectivity of the female suppose to make the break into the macho's world status quo which was the pornographic photography stereotype of the static body, given to the viewer as a fetish.

Gelitin cuts out the gun and leaves behind the whole rebel context. Genitals are to be explored here on their own without neither with the female object nor the subject. Everybody is invited for the equal play on the same rules – imagination is something given to all of us beyond the gender questions. In this context I would call the performance: the sexual manifestation of the equality of dreaming.

In one of the texts describing their artistic activity I found the term: The esthetic of generosity. And there was something that made you feel gifted. The nice detail were bananas hanging from the wooden palm trees (As Florian Gerner described it in radio interview: they sensed in Iceland some kind of nostalgia for tropical island and palm trees despite it is already an island), bottles of gin passed to the audience during the performance, reminding of spiritual rites where mystic is bond with conviviality.

Hekla said it is specific of the work with Gelitin that everybody is welcome with their ideas, to bring something in that could exist as a sister project functioning in the frame of the performance. "I didn't want to give them any frame as a curator. It was like being there and trying to be the best help", says Hekla. "And that can be sometimes challenging. It was an interesting twist of Viennese Action tradition Icelandic clichés and 70 feminism."

Gelitin didn't come with ready artworks, everything was born and developed during their few weeks stay in Iceland and is effect of the absorption of the local energy. They were very able to sense many commodities of local environment and play with them in original way. Like clichés of Icelandic shepards on the horses, lead by girls in Icelandic woolen sweters: lopapeysa, word games, tropical elements in the show,

American influences, the word inventory so common for proud of their language Icelanders; for example for the need of this show a new Icelandic word: hugris was created. "They were quite amused with word games all the time: puffin-muffin, phony-pony it was running all the time during their stay."— says the graphic designer Goddur, also the author of the collage text on imagination, which was given in print to the public and the graphical part of the work on the poster for this show.

The theatrical and ritualistic character of the self-exposure were indeed remarkable for the show in Reykjavik with a intensity of the experience leading to the cathartic state. In the spectrum of Gelitin works this one is kind of special by it's promises of healing through the rituals. For sure Icelandic-Viennese mix came out as a beautifully rounded pearl.

Hopefully the cooperation will be continued, as I was told there is an idea of publishing a catalogue with texts of Icelandic critics and drawings by Morri and Mundi. Hekla also thinks about doing something else with Gelitin in the future, but next time in Icelandic landscape.